

Message Text

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FM AMCONSUL PORT MORESBY

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 855

INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 PORT MORESBY 0919

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PP

SUBJ: PAPUA NEW GUINEA ON THE EVE OF INDEPENDENCE

I. BACKGROUND

1. PAPUA NEW GUINEA APPROACHES INDEPENDENCE WITH PRIDE AND HOPE AND ALSO WITH UNCERTAINTY AND FEAR. THE MIXED EMOTIONS REFLECT THE SITUATION. A VERY PRIMITIVE COUNTRY IS MOVING RAPIDLY INTO THE MODERN WORLD, PNG HAS ENORMOUSLY RICH NATURAL RESOURCES AND OTHER ADVANTAGES, AND AT THE SAME TIME, SERIOUS PROBLEMS.

2. IT IS ONE OF THE WORLD'S LAST VERY RICH AREAS TO AWAIT EXPLOITATION. COPPER, GOLD, SILVER AND ZINC ARE SOME OF THE MINERALS KNOWN TO EXIST IN COMMERCIALY PROFITABLE QUANTITIES. GAS HAS BEEN FOUND, AND OIL IS THOUGHT TO BE HERE. A WIDE VARIETY OF TROPICAL PRODUCE CAN BE GROWN, AND TUNA FISHING GROUNDS AND TIMBER RESOURCES ARE BEING EAGERLY SOUGHT AFTER BY FOREIGN COMPANIES. THE RATIO OF ITS RESOURCES TO POPULATION IS VERY FAVORABLE. WITH FEWER THAN 3 MILLION PEOPLE AND A POPULATION DENSITY OF 7 PERSONS PER SQUARE MILE, IT IS MUCH MORE FAVORABLY ENDOWED

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THAN MOST DEVELOPING COUNTRIES. DUE TO THE GENEROUS

ECONOMIC AID FROM AUSTRALIA THE BEGINNINGS OF THE INFRASTRUCTURE ARE ALREADY IN PLACE AND PAPUA NEW GUINEA APPROACHES INDEPENDENCE WITH NO SIGNIFICANT INTERNATIONAL INDEBTEDNESS. THE GOVERNMENT HAS HAD ALMOST TWO YEARS EXPERIENCE IN RUNNING THE COUNTRY, AND MANY POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS ARE ALREADY OPERATIVE. THE ARMY HAS STAYED OUT OF POLITICS AND IS LOYAL TO THE GOVERNMENT. PNG IS AT PEACE WITH ITS NEIGHBORS AND ITS INTERNATIONAL PROBLEMS ARE MINOR. THERE IS A STRONG EGALITARIAN TRADITION AMONG THE PEOPLE; THERE ARE NO IDEOLOGICAL HANGUPS.

3. ON THE OTHER HAND, PAPUA NEW GUINEA SUFFERS FROM DEEP DIVISIONS OF GEOGRAPHY AND LANGUAGE AND FROM WIDE VARIATIONS IN DEGREE OF DEVELOPMENT. THE RAPID PACE OF MODERNIZATION IS LEAVING LARGE SECTIONS FAR BEHIND. SOPHISTICATED POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SYSTEMS HAVE BEEN IMPOSED ON A PRIMITIVE TRIBAL SOCIETY WITHOUT THE TRADITIONS AND WITHOUT THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE VALUES THAT ARE NEEDED TO MAKE THESE NEW SYSTEMS WORK. ONLY 15 PERCENT OF THE PEOPLE ARE LITERATE. THE LEADERSHIP OF THE COUNTRY IS PAINFULLY SMALL IN NUMBER AND THE SUPPLY OF TRAINED MANPOWER IS QUITE INADEQUATE TO RUN THE COUNTRY ANYTHING LIKE THE DEGREE OF EFFICIENCY KNOWN UNDER AUSTRALIAN RULE. THE PEOPLE HAVE HIGH EXPECTATIONS, ESPECIALLY IN ITS FIELD OF MATERIAL WEALTH. THE TREMENDOUS OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE TO TRAINED YOUNG PEOPLE ARE LEADING THEM TO FOCUS MORE ON THEIR OWN CAREERS THAN ON THE COUNTRY'S FUTURE. AN ELITE HAS BEEN CREATED WHICH CAN EASILY BECOME AND IN FACT IS PROBABLY NOW BECOMING DIVIDED FROM THE PEOPLE.

II. THE TRANSFER OF POWER

4. THE MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS OF RECENT YEARS HAVE BEEN THE TRANSFER OF POWER FROM AUSTRALIA TO PAPUA NEW GUINEA, A TRANSFER ACCELERATED BY THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SELF-GOVERNMENT ON DECEMBER 1, 1973, AND ALMOST COMPLETED SIX MONTHS BEFORE INDEPENDENCE. THE TRANSFER OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR EDUCATION, POLICE, CUSTOMS, IMMIGRATION, CONFIDENTIAL

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CURRENCY, TAXATION, THE COURTS, DEFENSE, FOREIGN AFFAIRS, AND OTHER MATTERS HAS FORCED THE GPNG TO MAKE A VAST NUMBER OF DECISIONS IN A SHORT PERIOD OF TIME AND HAS REQUIRED RAPID ADJUSTMENTS BY THE PEOPLE.

5. IN ADDITION TO THE FORMAL SHIFT OF POWER, THE CONTINUING DEPARTURE OF WHITE PERSONNEL (MOSTLY AUSTRALIAN) AND THEIR REPLACEMENT WITH PAPUA NEW

GUINEANS IS PLACING CONTROL OF PNG MATTERS IN PNG HANDS IN THE BUREAUCRACY, THE MILITARY, THE POLICE, THE UNIVERSITIES, THE SCHOOLS, THE MISSIONS, THE POLITICAL PARTIES, THE BUSINESS FIRMS AND ELSEWHERE. THE POWER THAT WILL REMAIN OUTSIDE PNG HANDS AFTER SEPTEMBER 16 WILL RESULT FROM THE REMAINING WHITE ADVISORS, SOME OF WHOM STILL WIELD GREAT INFLUENCE HERE, FROM THE AUSTRALIAN AID PROGRAM WHICH, EVEN AFTER THE RECENT CUT WILL STILL PROVIDE HALF THE FUNDS IN THE PNG BUDGET, AND FROM THE DOMINANT POSITION OF FOREIGN FIRMS (LARGELY AUSTRALIAN BUT ALSO JAPANESE) IN THE ECONOMY.

6. EVEN IN THE ECONOMIC SPHERE, INSTRUMENTALITIES HAVE BEEN CREATED TO BEGIN THE LIQUIDATION OF FOREIGN ECONOMIC POWER. THE NEW LAND ACQUISITION ACT IS FACILITATING THE TRANSFER OF AUSTRALIAN PLANTATIONS TO PAPUA NEW GUINEANS. THE INVESTMENT CORPORATION OF PNG IS OPERATING TO BUY INTO FOREIGN-HELD BUSINESS INTERESTS. THE DEVELOPMENT BANK OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA IS NOW MAKING CAPITAL AVAILABLE FOR SMALL LOCAL ENTERPRISES WHICH WILL COMPETE WITH FOREIGN ECONOMIC ACTIVITY. IN ADDITION THE GPNG IS MAKING AN EFFORT TO BRING PRESENT AND FUTURE FOREIGN INVESTMENT UNDER CLOSER CONTROL THROUGH TAXATION, ROYALTIES, ETC.

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III. THE CONSOLIDATION OF POWER

7. THE MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEM NOW FACED BY PAPUA NEW GUINEA IS HOW TO CONSOLIDATE AND ORGANIZE ITS NEWLY ACQUIRED POWER IN ORDER TO FULFILL THE ASPIRATIONS OF THE PEOPLE. THE TASK OF ORGANIZING WILL BE UNDERTAKEN WITH A STEADILY DECREASING NUMBER OF FOREIGN EXPERTS, AND HENCE THE INSTITUTIONS AND THEIR OPERATION WILL BE INCREASINGLY MELANESIAN AND DECREASINGLY EFFECTIVE, WHEN JUDGED BY WESTERN STANDARDS, BUT PERHAPS BETTER SUITED TO THE NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE.

8. POWER IS WIDELY DISPERSED. THERE ARE MANY CENTERS OF POWER, NONE OF THEM REALLY STRONG, WITH EVEN THE STRONGEST DEPENDING UPON THE SUPPORT OF SEVERAL OTHER GROUPS EACH OF WHICH HAS INFLUENCE IN ITS OWN RIGHT AND EACH OF WHICH COULD BREAK OFF AND ALLY WITH ANOTHER CENTER OF POWER. ALMOST ALL OF THESE GROUPS ARE LACKING EITHER IN DISCIPLINE OR HOMOGENEITY, WITH THE ARMY BEING THE MOST COHESIVE AND BEST DISCIPLINED AMONG THEM. AT PRESENT CHIEF MINISTER SOMARE HAS BEEN ABLE TO GATHER A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF CENTERS OF POWER TO HIS SUPPORT, AND HAS PERSUADED OTHER GROUPS TO BE NEUTRAL. HE IS IN CONFIDENTIAL

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DIRECT CONFRONTATION, HOWEVER, WITH THE SEPARATIST GROUPS, ESPECIALLY IN BOUGAINVILLE, NEW BRITAIN AND PAPUA. THESE ARE THE GROUPS THAT HAVE ETHNIC AND GEOGRAPHIC HOMOGENEITY, AN LIKE THE CENTERS OF POWER BASED ON WESTERN INSTITUTIONS WHICH CUT ACROSS ETHNIC AND REGIONAL LINES. IF SOMARE IS NOT ABLE TO OBTAIN THE BENEFITS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FOR THE PEOPLE, HE WILL FIND OTHER REGIONAL GROUPS TURNING AGAINST HIM. IF HE IS UNABLE TO CONTINUE THE MATERIAL BENEFITS TO THE ELITE GROUPS (THE ARMY, THE PUBLIC SERVICE, THE TEACHERS), THEY MAY SHIFT ALLEGIANCE TO THOSE WHO CAN PROVIDE THE MATERIAL BENEFITS THEY WANT.

9. FOR THE PRESENT, HOWEVER, SOMARE HAS THE BACKING OF A WOBBLY COALITION, INCLUDING THE SUPPORT OF FINMIN CHAN, HIS MOST SERIOUS POTENTIAL RIVAL. THE WEAK PANGU PARTY ALSO SUPPORTS SOMARE, AND HAS NO PLACE TO GO WITHOUT HIM. THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE IS HIS MOST TRUSTED COLLEAGUE IN THE CABINET, AND THE RANKING PNG OFFICER IN THE DEFENCE FORCE IS A CLOSE PERSONAL FRIEND OF THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE. THE MINISTER OF POLICE COMES FROM THE SAME DISTRICT AS THE CHIEF MINISTER, AND IS A WARM PERSONAL FRIEND. THE POLICE COMMISSIONER AND HIS STAFF DESPISE THE MINISTER OF POLICE, BUT THIS IS A PERSONAL ANTI-PATHY AND THEY HAVE NO KNOWN ALLEGIANCE

ELSEWHERE. DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION, HEADED BY ONE OF SOMARE'S MOST TRUSTED PUBLIC SERVICE LIEUTENANTS, IS BELIEVED TO BE COMPLETELY LOYAL TO HIM. BOTH THE NATIONAL BROADCASTING COMMISSION AND THE OFFICE OF INFORMATION ARE DIRECTLY RESPONSIBLE TO SOMARE, AND THE ONE DAILY NEWSPAPER (AUSTRALIAN OWNED) DOES NOT OPPOSE HIM. ORGANIZED LABOR IS NOT STRONG, AND IS AS CLOSELY ALLIED TO SOMARE AS TO ANY OTHER GROUP.

10. SOMARE'S MAJOR PROBLEM IS NOT THE STRENGTH OF ANY KNOWN RIVAL, RATHER IT IS THE DIFFUSION OF POWER WHICH MAY PREVENT HIM FROM TAKING THE ACTIONS REQUIRED TO GIVE PAPUA NEW GUINEANS THE CARS, HOUSES, SCHOOLS, CLINICS, HI-FI SETS AND ALL THE OTHER PRODUCTS OF WESTERNIZATION THEY NOW SEE IN THE HANDS OF WHITES AND CHINESE.

11. THE BASICS OF LIVING ARE MORE READILY AVAILABLE
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FOR PAPUA NEW GUINEANS, EVEN THOSE IN THE BUSH, THAN FOR PEOPLE IN MANY LDC'S. PEOPLE HERE ARE NOT AT THE STARVATION LEVEL, THEY HAVE PLENTY OF WATER IN MOST PARTS OF THE COUNTRY AND THE CLIMATE IS BENIGN. BUT THEIR EXPECTATIONS ARE HIGH, PARTICULARLY AS THEY DRIFT TO THE URBAN CENTERS AND ARE CUT OFF FROM THEIR TRADITIONAL ENVIRONMENT. THE PROBLEMS ARE HIGH EXPECTATIONS AND ENVY OF THE WHITES AND CHINESE, NOT ABJECT POVERTY.

12. THE ECONOMY, STRAINING TO KEEP PACE WITH A POPULATION INCREASE OF AROUND 3 PERCENT AND AN INFLATION RATE REFLECTING THAT OF ITS MAJOR TRADING PARTNERS, IS FILLED WITH BOTTLENECKS. FOOD IS IMPORTED INTO A LAND WHERE ANYTHING CAN GROW. TIMBER AND FISHERY RESOURCES ARE EXPORTED WITH LITTLE BENEFIT TO THE ECONOMY. HALF THE BUDGET COMES FROM AUSTRALIA. ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS ARE VIRTUALLY NON-EXISTANT AMONG PAPUA NEW GUINEANS. AUSTRALIANS AND CHINESE ARE ENTREPRENEURS AND SHOPKEEPERS. THEY ARE ALSO THE PEOPLE WHO KEEP THE GENERATORS RUNNING, THE PLUMBING WORKING AND THE VEHICLES ON THE ROADS.

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FM AMCONSUL PORT MORESBY

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13. WE ANTICIPATE A SLOWING DOWN OF THE ECONOMY IN THE NEXT YEAR OR SO. THE CUTBACK IN AUSTRALIAN AID, THE SOFTENING OF COMMODITY PRICES ON THE WORLD MARKET, THE INTERNATIONAL RECESSION, AND WIDESPREAD INFLATION ARE COMING TOGETHER AT INDEPENDENCE. THE LONGER THE ECONOMIC SETBACK LASTS, THE MORE SEVERE IT IS, THE MORE SERIOUS THE POLITICAL REPERCUSSIONS WILL BE. WELL AWARE OF THIS SITUATION, THE GPNG IS BEGINNING TO DISPLAY GREATER RECEPTIVITY TO FOREIGN PRIVATE INVESTMENT. SEVERAL LARGE PROJECTS ARE NOW PENDING AND IF APPROVED THEY WILL EVENTUALLY PROVIDE TAX REVENUE, EXPORT EARNINGS AND JOBS. THE LEAD TIME FOR MOST OF THEM IS 6 TO 10 YEARS, BUT THEY WILL REQUIRE CONSTRUCTION WORKERS TO BUILD ROADS, BRIDGES AND HOUSES BEFORE BECOMING OPERATIONAL. THE PROJECTS NOW UNDER CONSIDERATION INCLUDE A U.S. STEEL GOLD MINE (\$200 MILLION), PARSONS AND WHITEMORE PULP MILL (\$350 MILLION), THREE COPPER MINES (OK TEDDI, FRIEDA RIVER AND YANDARA PLUS NEW STRIKE NEAR OK TEDDI) WHICH MAY BE DEVELOPED BY INTERNATIONAL CONSORTIA, AND TWO RELATIVELY EMULP FISH CANNING PROJECTS. IN ADDITION ARE THE NATURAL GAS EXPLORATORY WORK UNDERTAKEN BY A JAPANESE CONSORTIUM AND OIL DRILLING IN THREE LOCALITIES BY U.S./AUSTRALIAN/

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BRITISH CONSORTIA. FURTHER DOWN THE ROAD IS THE ENORMOUS PURARI HYDROELECTRIC PROJECT WHICH WILL REQUIRE BILLIONS OF DOLLARS TO DEVELOP BUT WHICH IS EXPECTED TO CREATE

LARGE AMOUNTS OF RELATIVELY CHEAP ELECTRICITY. CONSTRUCTION OF THE FIRST DAM SHOULD BEGIN ABOUT 1979/80. PROJECTS SUCH AS THESE PROMISE THAT ONCE PNG HAS STABILIZED, IT HAS A VERY BRIGHT ECONOMIC FUTURE AHEAD.

IV. FOREIGN RELATIONS

14. PAPUA NEW GUINEA IS AN INWARD LOOKING COUNTRY MAINLY CONCERNED WITH DOMESTIC PROBLEMS. IT IS AT PEACE WITH ITS NEIGHBORS AND HAS NO PRESSING FOREIGN POLICY PROBLEMS. THE MOST IMPORTANT COUNTRIES FOR PAPUA NEW GUINEA ARE AUSTRALIA, INDONESIA AND JAPAN. AUSTRALIA IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE OF THE LONG AND CLOSE ASSOCIATION, BECAUSE OF ITS VERY LARGE AID PROGRAM AND BECAUSE OF THE IMPORTANCE OF AUSTRALIAN FIRMS IN THE ECONOMY. THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN QUEENSLAND AND PNG, STILL UNSETTLED, COULD CREATE PROBLEMS BUT WILL PROBABLY BE SETTLED AMIABLY. INDONESIA IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE IT SHARES THE WESTERN BOUNDARY WHICH DIVIDES THE MELANESIANS OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA FROM THE MELANESIANS OF IRIAN JAYA. JAPAN IS IMPORTANT COMMERCIALLY AS IT HAS MADE CONSIDERABLE INROADS INTO AUSTRALIA'S PRIVILEGED POSITION IN THE ECONOMY. PNG, HOWEVER, HAS CLOSE TIES WITH THE OTHER PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES BECAUSE OF ETHNIC AND EMOTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS AND, ALSO BECAUSE PNG IS MORE COMFORTABLE IN DEALING WITH SMALLER COUNTRIES. NEVERTHELESS, GPNG IS BEGINNING TO RECOGNIZE THAT ITS ECONOMY WILL HAVE MORE IN COMMON WITH THE ECONOMIES OF THE PHILIPPINES AND INDONESIA THAN WITH THE CORAL ATOLLS OF THE PACIFIC.

15. PAPUA NEW GUINEA IS EXPECTED TO PURSUE A FOREIGN POLICY OF RATHER RESERVED FRIENDSHIP WITH THE LARGER COUNTRIES AND WILL TRY TO AVOID MAKING ENEMIES OUT OF ANY OF THEM. HOWEVER, THE GPNG FINDS THE COMPLICATIONS OF FOREIGN RELATIONS BAFFLING AND FRAUGHT WITH PROBLEMS. IT WILL PROBABLY TRY TO AVOID TAKING STANDS ON AS MANY QUESTIONS AS IT CAN, ESPECIALLY THE QUESTIONS THAT DO NOT DIRECTLY AND IMMEDIATELY AFFECT PNG. IT WILL
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AVOID CONFRONTATION. AT LEAST INITIALLY, PNG WILL STAY APART FROM THE RADICAL PRO-ASIAN BLOC COUNTRIES, AND WILL ABSTAIN FROM ISSUES NOT DIRECTLY AFFECTING THE SOUTH PACIFIC.
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